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ABSTRACT

Fifty strategies developed and used over the past 20 years in school districts throughout New York and California for meeting the needs of single parent families are identified in this brief listing. A single descriptive line is devoted to each of the strategies, which are grouped into seven categories: curriculum/instruction, general, parent group, personnel/staff, public relations, special programs, and support services/attendance guidance. (PGD)

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TOPIC

50 Steps You and Your School District Can Do To Help Single Parent Families

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INTRODUCTION

These strategies have been developed over the past twenty years. They have been used in school districts throughout New York and California. It is estimated that one out of four students in public schools come from single parent homes. Hopefully, these interventions will enable you to more effectively meet the needs of these students, their parents and community.

Curriculum/Instruction

- Structure curriculum to temper mother's/father's day - include strand for someone special.
- Review instructional materials for role models.
- Check media center, library collection, so appropriate selection of materials on single parents is available.
- Examine the content of lessons - i.e., family tree, my father's job, "what my mother means to me?"
- Instill sense of pride, success, self esteem and worth - work on the affective domain.
- Promote concepts beyond the nuclear family - such as community, state, nation globe - the family of mankind - oneness of everyone.
- Bring into curriculum stories of successful adults from single parent families or successful single parents - entertainment, political, scientists, fine arts performers, or athletes.

General

- Recognize various types of single parent families caused by divorce, death absence of one parent due to military service, etc.
- Photograph all students to insure identification.
- Maintain security system for release of students to parent and information to parent - custody battles, child stealing, etc.
- Work closely with local clergy persons.
- Understand that single families are not specific to any ethnic, social or economic group.

Parent Group

- Involve parents in committees, advisory panels.
- Organize a single parent committee in parent advisory, PTA, citizens committee, etc.
- Encourage parent liaison between standard family and single parent family.

Personnel/Staff

- Inservice staff to be sensitive to needs of students from single parent family.
- Stress importance of teachers calling parent directly.
- Avoid label of single parent as a negative connotation.
- Watch for phrases creeping into vocabulary of staff - "other side of the tracks", " divorced woman", carrying a moral judgement.
- Utilize classified staff members as support personnel with students from single parent families.
- Assign staff to students with consideration of appropriate role models.

Public Relations

- Record messages regarding special events, schedules, minimum days, etc. and have available on 24 hour information line.
- Secure cooperative agreements with business so you can call employee at work site regarding their child.
- Create parent-visitor center at school.
- Publish quarterly newsletter to parent.
- Prepare annual calendar of school - mail to all parents, patrons. Feature pictures of students from all families.

Special Programs

- Hold Saturday school.
- Institute in-school suspension program.
- Invite senior citizen in to serve as grandparents, support personnel for students.
- Feature Open House every day.
- Send commendation letters to parent on student achievement.
- Operate a breakfast program.
- Recruit students from single parent families into school activities.
- Fund infant, child care center.
- Orient students to new school - more than single shot -give experience.
- Video highlights of school so parent can use a video recorder at home.
- Tape major meetings or presentations and have available to parent.

Support Services/Attendance Guidance

- Install 24 hour answering service for attendance.
- Establish evening and Saturday counseling hours - set appointments for parent.
- Network with community, county human service agencies.
- Mail report cards, progress reports, conference notices to employers address.
- Schedule group counseling sessions for students whose family situation has suddenly become a single parent family.
- Develop peer counseling program.
- Stagger hours of personnel in Attendance Office to provide 12-16 hour service (i.e. 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.).
- Program attendance call back system to call parent at home during hours you know parent will be at home.
- Watch carefully for proper medical care from glasses to shoes.
- Secure financial aid for post high school educational opportunities.
- Avoid schedule, class changes without direct contact with parent.
- Supply annually a report to parent on students progress toward graduation mastery levels, completions of minimum competencies.
- Pair troubled students from single parent families with staff members who may have come from a single parent family or have counseling background.

CONCLUSION

If I can provide additional information on any one of these concepts please call or write. As the number of students entering our schools from single parent families has mushroomed to one in four, we must meet their needs. These successful practices are a beginning. It is important we each tailor these interventions to the needs of our respective districts.

The students from single parent families are at the school-house door. How is your district dealing, meeting the needs of these students and their parents? To ignore the uniqueness of these students is to slam the school house door in their face. Join with us in helping these students and parents be winners.

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